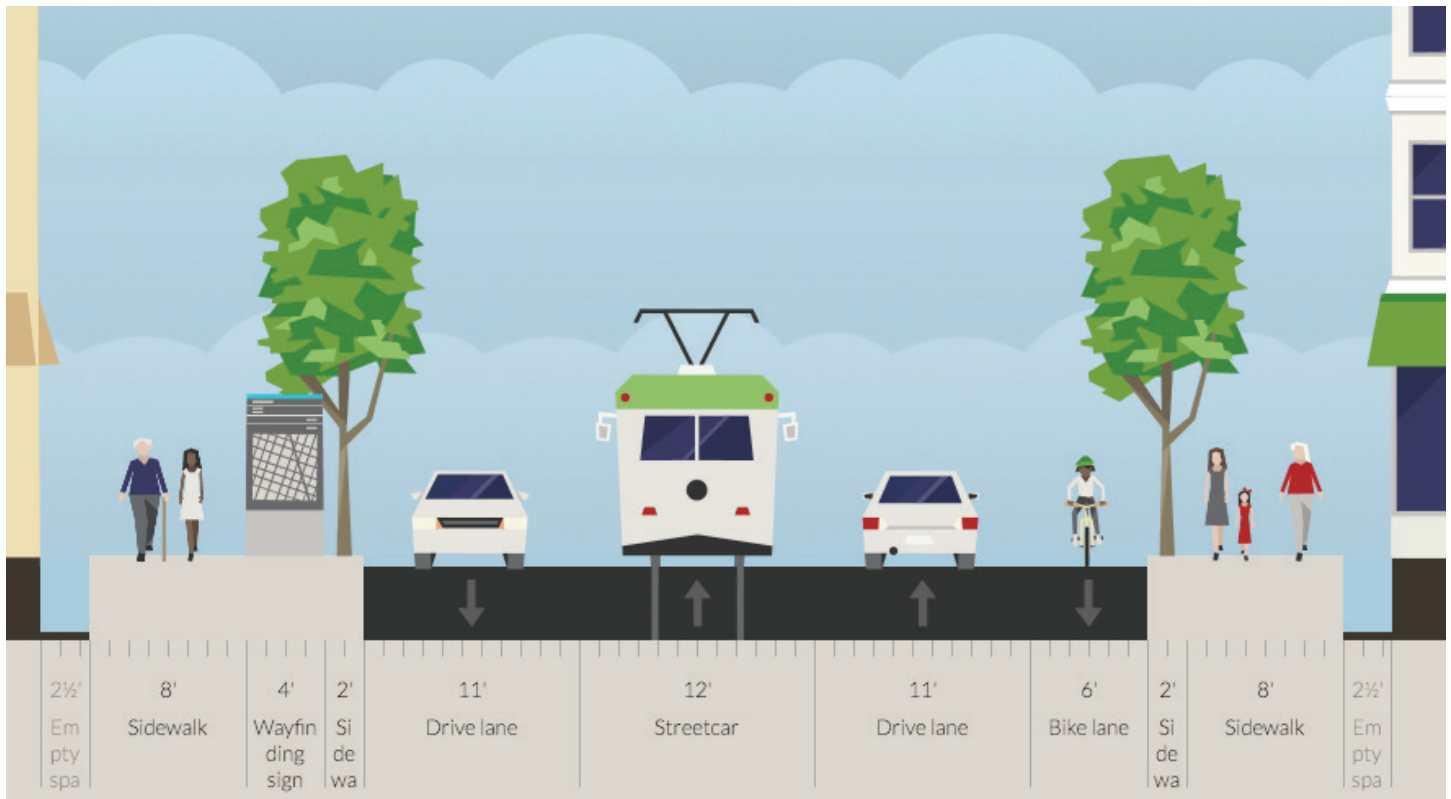Fall November 11, 2016

Streetplan: Hacking for a Participatory Tool

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How can technology inform planning processes? During the first part of 2016 a team from Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo engaged in a civic hacking exercise, demonstrating one way that technology can inform community input in a public forum. In 2016, William Riggs, Michael Boswell and Ryder Ross undertook a pilot street design project as a part of Vision San Luis Obispo in San Luis Obispo, CA using a tool called Streetplan. Streetplan is a tool built on a forked (or hacked) version of Streetmix, an open-source street design and visualization platform on the web.

The team saw additional potential in the tool that would allow for planners to gather conceptual components of a street in real time. The existing Streetmix platform did not allow for data to be captured and aggregated for policy decision-making, and did not bind alternatives in reality (e.g. limiting the width of a street to the actual ROW for example). Thus, the team saw opportunity to share a tool that would be more useful in gathering data on streets and corridors as a part of a participatory planning process.

Using a case study street in the City of San Luis Obispo, the team created a tool which captured unique information from users in a public forum. That information was then aggregated to develop the "final result,"—or rather, a broad representation of the entire public's opinion. This final result was then beta tested at a public event, where additional information was collected on how the public at large prefers to allocate active transportation resources in that location. Through this participatory tool, the team was able to enrich the transportation planning process and develop new methods of digital representation.

The project is summarized in a working paper on the Social Science Research Network at the link below, and additional pilot sites and partnerships are being explored.